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FILE ONLY

A Taped Reminder Of the American Hostages in Beirut

OVER the past 10 months five Americans have disappeared in Beirut, presumably kidnapped and held by Moslem terrorists hostile to the United States. Unlike the 53 Americans held by the Iranians in Teheran, the Beirut hostages had been largely ignored by their countrymen until last week when one of them made a 56-second appearance on a video tape.

William Buckley, a political officer at the American Embassy in Beirut, was shown appealing to the United States to "take action for our release quickly." The tape, evidently made in the past two weeks, was obtained by the London-based agency Visnews from an undisclosed source and shown here by NBC. Mr. Buckley reported that as of "today, the 22nd of January, 1985," he and his fellow captives, Benjamin Weir, a Presbyterian minister, and Jeremy Levin, Beirut bureau chief of Cable News Network, were well. He did not mention Peter Kilburn, a librarian at the American University, missing since Dec. 3, or the Rev. Martin Lawrence Jenco, who directed Catholic Relief Services in Beirut until he was seized Jan. 8.

President Reagan indicated quiet diplomacy was being pursued to obtain the freedom of the five men. But again in contrast to the Teheran ordeal, officials say they are not sure who is holding them, or where they are being held or for what purpose. Mr. Buckley, who was kidnapped March 16 as he was leaving his apartment, did not specify what action was required to get a quick release.

Unclear Motives

A clue to the captors' motives was contained in an earlier video tape sent secretly to the State Department in July. It showed Mr. Levin, Mr. Weir and Mr. Buckley, with Mr. Levin calling for the release of 17 Shiite Moslems held by Kuwait for terrorist attacks against the American and French Embassies and Government buildings in the Persian Gulf state in December 1983. That was also the demand of hijackers who forced a Kuwaiti airliner to fly to Teheran last month and killed two American passengers before surrendering to Iranian authorities. The Shiites were not released. Another possible motive for the hostage-taking lay in an extremist campaign to rid Lebanon of foreigners. Recent telephone calls to press agencies in Beirut have demanded that all Americans leave.